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Chairman: Mr. Kmoníček ..... (Czech Republic)
later: Mr. Léon ..... (Venezuela)
Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. Mselle

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The meeting was called to order at 9.35 a.m.

Agenda item 121: Proposed programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005 (*continued*) (A/58/6 and Corr.1, A/58/6 (Introduction), A/58/6 (Sect. 1), A/58/6 (Sect. 2), A/58/6 (Sect. 3) and Corr.1 and 2, A/58/6 (Sect. 4), A/58/6 (Sect. 5), A/58/6 (Sect. 6), A/58/6 (Sect. 7), A/58/6 (Sect. 8), A/58/6 (Sect. 9), A/58/6 (Sect. 10), A/58/6 (Sect. 11), A/58/6 (Sect. 12), A/58/6 (Sect. 13) and Add.1, A/58/6 (Sect. 14)/Rev.1, A/58/6 (Sect. 15), A/58/6 (Sect. 16), A/58/6 (Sect. 17), A/58/6 (Sect. 18), A/58/6 (Sect. 19), A/58/6 (Sect. 20), A/58/6 (Sect. 21), A/58/6 (Sect. 22), A/58/6 (Sect. 23), A/58/6 (Sect. 24), A/58/6 (Sect. 25), A/58/6 (Sect. 26), A/58/6 (Sect. 27), A/58/6 (Sect. 28), A/58/6 (Sect. 29), A/58/6 (Sect. 30), A/58/6 (Sect. 31), A/58/6 (Sect. 32), A/58/6 (Sect. 33), A/58/6 (Sect. 34), A/58/6 (Sect. 35), A/58/6 (Income Sect. 1), A/58/6 (Income Sect. 2), A/58/6 (Income Sect. 3) and A/58/7 and Corr.1)

Agenda item 122: Programme planning (*continued*) (A/58/16)

1. **Mr. Al-Mansour** (Kuwait) said that his delegation agreed with the statement made by Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. All Member States must pay their assessed contributions in full, on time and without conditions in order for the United Nations to effectively implement the programme set out in the medium-term plan.

2. The Kuwaiti delegation attached great importance to information activities that allowed the message of the United Nations to be spread throughout the world. Information and communications technologies, including the United Nations web site, and radio and television programmes, played a significant role in that respect.

3. His delegation was concerned at the high level of vacant posts at the senior management level, a situation that hindered the implementation of programmes. Consultants should be hired only as a last resort and in the absence of in-house skills. His delegation was pleased that the Secretariat and Member States had cooperated in the implementation of the reforms and that the Secretary-General had endeavoured to present a programme budget that took account of the wishes of Member States and of established priorities, particularly with regard to the Millennium Goals.

4. **Mr. Tootoonchian** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that his delegation agreed with the statement made by Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. In its new format, the programme budget was shorter and more strategically oriented. He recalled that the General Assembly had also requested that the programme budget should better reflect priorities and should contain enough information for Member States to take well-informed decisions.

5. His delegation favoured a more thorough application of results-based budgeting. However, that new approach must not be considered a cost-cutting measure but a means of ensuring effective implementation of all programme elements and better monitoring of the cost-effectiveness and quality of outputs. It must not lead the Organization to depart from its legislative mandates or to discontinue those activities that had not produced results during a certain period of time. His delegation also wished to make it clear that the budgetary process, as approved by the General Assembly in its resolutions 41/213 and 42/211, must be fully adhered to.

6. His delegation noted that the reallocation of resources between several programmes, proposed by the Secretary-General, must reflect the priorities established in the medium-term plan and must lead to an adequate allocation of resources in the economic and social development fields, as mandated by the Millennium Development Goals. The question of development must be treated as a top priority which was indispensable for the achievement of results in other areas of priority.

7. The resources approved by the General Assembly must be sufficient to allow for the implementation of all mandates of the Organization and to ensure the proper functioning of the intergovernmental machinery. In that regard, the trend towards the funding of priority areas through extrabudgetary resources, which by nature were unpredictable and meant for a specific purpose, was a cause for concern.

8. His delegation noted the total amount and the rate of growth of the budget proposed by the Secretary-General and of the corresponding recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, which had stated that an additional amount of $150 million would be required after an updated recosting. His delegation also noted the Secretary-General's propositions and the Advisory

Committee's recommendations concerning the creation of new posts, and observed that the scope for redeployment of existing posts had been explored. It noted that staff costs represented almost 80 per cent of the regular budget and that over 9,000 posts were financed from the regular budget and 7,000 from extrabudgetary funds.

9. **Ms. Zobrist Rentenaar** (Switzerland) said that the objective of her delegation was the adoption by the General Assembly of a programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005 that would enable the Secretary-General to implement the reform outlined in his report entitled "Strengthening of the United Nations: an agenda for further change" (A/57/387). She took note of the improvements to the format of the budget document, which had made it more strategic and reader-friendly and which represented progress towards the implementation of results-based budgeting. Her delegation would follow very closely the discussions on the strengthening of the intergovernmental review of the planning and budgeting cycle and hoped that they would result in a closer alignment of political priorities and budgetary planning.

10. Her delegation was committed to transparency and strict budgetary discipline. However, it was not insisting on a particular budget level, since it considered that effective and efficient programme delivery was of equal importance. It took the view that the recommendations of the Advisory Committee could be taken as a basis for negotiations.

11. Three areas were of priority importance for Switzerland: human rights, refugees and humanitarian assistance. She was concerned that a considerable share of operational activities in those essential areas were financed through extrabudgetary funds and, in that connection, fully supported the increase in budgetary resources for the three competent bodies (the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)) in order to ensure a more balanced and predictable funding structure. With regard to human rights, it was particularly important to cover the costs incurred by the treaty bodies and the special procedures of the Commission on Human Rights. On a related subject, she welcomed the more comprehensive treatment of the issue of gender mainstreaming in the programme budget.

12. She supported the Advisory Committee's recommendation on global management of the staffing table, which would give the Secretary-General the necessary flexibility to overcome structural rigidities and to deploy personnel in response to changing priorities. As far as the proposed new posts were concerned, particularly those related to the reform process, her delegation took the view that, unfortunately, the proposed programme budget too often lacked full justification in terms of expected accomplishments and workload.

13. She was not convinced of the usefulness of deferring recosting until the first performance report was taken up, as the Advisory Committee had suggested. She was concerned that the Organization's cash flow difficulties might have implications for programme delivery in Geneva and Vienna, and took the view that a long-standing established procedure should not be changed hastily.

14. As far as the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) was concerned, her delegation recognized the need for a system-wide, independent oversight body but wished to point out that the working methods of JIU needed to be reviewed in order to improve its efficiency and accountability.

15. **Ms. Goicochea** (Cuba) said that her delegation endorsed the statement made by the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. As far as the principles behind the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005 were concerned, she shared the view of the Secretary-General. It was necessary to adopt a budget that would enable the Organization to implement all mandated programmes and to ensure the quality of the services delivered. The adoption of restrictive budgets, with zero growth, was indicative of certain parties' political will towards the Organization. The elimination of obsolete outputs was the responsibility of Member States but, unfortunately, had been used as a pretext for further budgetary cuts. Taking into account the importance of economic and social development activities for the political stability of nations, she hoped that the resources allocated to those activities would be sufficient.

16. With regard to priorities, she reaffirmed that the medium-term plan must be the basis for the preparation of the budget. She took note with interest of the redeployment of resources by the Secretary-General between the subprogrammes and wondered if the time

had come to incorporate into the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning a number of new provisions concerning the definition of priorities within programmes. She requested the Secretariat to submit through the Committee for Programme and Coordination a report on priority setting, including at the subprogramme level, to the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session.

17. Turning to the new format of the budget, she regretted that, on the pretexts of conciseness and greater flexibility for the Secretariat in the use of resources, a considerable amount of information had been omitted from the budget documents, with the result being that Member States were no longer in a position to know how resources would be shared among the various objects of expenditure within each chapter and were therefore deprived of their right to decide on and control the use of resources. She recalled that, in resolution 57/290 B, the General Assembly had requested that the peacekeeping budget documents should contain all the information needed for Member States to reach well-informed decisions. Consequently, she called on the Secretary-General to submit to Member States the report requested by the Assembly General in paragraph 35 of resolution 57/300 and to publish as official documents the annexes to the various chapters of the budget, failing which the informal consultations would run the risk of being unproductive. The Secretariat should also specify how it planned to implement the provisions of paragraph 17 of General Assembly resolution 55/231, pursuant to which any redeployment of resources required the prior approval of the General Assembly.

18. While she welcomed the improvements to the format of the budget brought about by results-based budgeting, she stressed that that approach must be further refined and applied globally to the management of the Secretariat.

19. She noted that the proposed programme budget submitted to the General Assembly was supposed to follow up on a number of recommendations contained in the document entitled "Strengthening of the United Nations: an agenda for further change" (A/57/387), on which agreement had not been reached at the time of the adoption of resolution 57/300. She felt that the Secretariat should have grouped all those proposals together in a report that should have been submitted to the General Assembly at the same time as the proposed programme budget.

20. She noted with regret that, as far as the budgetary reform process was concerned, the only element of resolution 41/213 that had been maintained was the adoption by consensus of decisions concerning the proposed budget. Furthermore, she was unsure as to the value of such a consensus. The proposed reforms were designed to benefit the Advisory Committee by limiting the fundamental role played by the Fifth Committee in the consideration and approval of the proposed budget.

21. Taking into account the importance that her delegation attached to the consideration of the proposed budget at the first reading, she suggested that a mechanism should be implemented that would enable, if necessary and at the request of delegations, particular chapters of the budget to be further considered during formal meetings.

22. Lastly, she stressed that the Advisory Committee's proposal on recosting, which normally took place in December, tended towards zero growth, which was contrary to the spirit and letter of resolution 41/213. The Advisory Committee should adhere strictly to its mandate and refrain from making recommendations that prejudged the outcome of the intergovernmental debate.

23. **Mr. Mahiga** (United Republic of Tanzania) said that his delegation wished to associate itself with the statements made by the representative of Morocco, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, and by the representative of Botswana, on behalf of the African Group. The Secretary-General was to be commended for including in the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005 the priorities set out in the medium-term plan as well as the goals set forth in the Millennium Declaration. His delegation welcomed the increase in support for the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and wished to stress that the zero-growth principle should be applied in a flexible manner in order to accommodate emergency situations.

24. His delegation welcomed the fact that the issue of gender mainstreaming, to which it attached particular importance, had again been amply reflected in the proposed programme budget. In that regard, it welcomed the recommendation of the Advisory Committee regarding overall management of the staffing table, as it would enable the Secretary-General to ensure that the table reflected gender equality and geographical distribution. However, his delegation was

concerned at the tendency to keep posts vacant in order to save money and believed that the recruitment process should be accelerated with a view to filling those posts.

25. Results-based budgeting was the best way to ensure the efficient administrative and financial functioning of the Organization. It should also make it possible to evaluate the impact of programmes and to improve budgetary discipline. It might prove difficult, however, to evaluate the expected outcomes where the latter were not easily quantifiable, as in the social field. The Organization should therefore train programme managers to ensure that the budget was well prepared on the basis of agreed priorities and sound indicators.

26. With respect to information and communication technologies, his delegation would urge that the United Nations information system be rationalized with a view to strengthening its outreach activities among civil society and to cutting costs.

27. In a world of unequal strengths, the process of setting priorities might sometimes be characterized by an element of subjectivity. It was therefore important to ensure that developing countries' needs were given due consideration. The budget for priority activities in the social, economic and humanitarian sectors was falling at certain United Nations agencies, particularly in the case of activities aimed at countries, like Tanzania, which hosted a large number of refugees on a permanent basis. As a result, costs were borne by the host countries. The Committee should examine the problem in an effort to find a solution.

28. **Mr. Eljy** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that the Committee should take up its consideration of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005 as expeditiously as possible, and should also consider the reports on reforming the modalities for consideration of the proposed programme budget. The implementation of United Nations policies and programmes should be the priority objective of the programme budget, which should also take due account of the medium-term plan, the Millennium Declaration and the outcomes of the major international conferences.

29. Even though budget documents were required to reflect the principle of results-based budgeting with a view to producing shorter and more strategy-oriented reports, the information they contained was not very clear and, in many cases, their conclusions were not based on duly established financial criteria. The Secretariat should provide Member States with more information translated into all the official languages of the Organization ahead of Committee debates.

30. Results-based budgeting was an administrative tool that made it possible to improve the implementation of programmes and budgets on the basis of proven indicators that reflected the objectives set by Member States. That tool, however, which was still at an experimental stage, was not an end in itself and must reflect the international character of the Organization, hence the need for it to be introduced gradually and in a manner that was in compliance with the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning.

31. The proposed programme budget submitted by the Secretary-General exceeded three billion dollars. It might be asked whether that amount would enable the Organization to effectively fulfil all of its prescribed mandates, in line with the expectations of Member States. The zero-growth principle was incompatible with the administrative and budgetary rules. The amount of the budget should be determined by the mandates, whose number had increased over the previous 10 years, and the numerous system-wide reform initiatives introduced by the Organization. In order to remedy that situation, the United Nations might perhaps stop financing certain items under the regular budget, particularly special political operations and information and communication technologies, especially since the Organization's operating costs accounted for 80 percent of the proposed programme budget, leaving little with which to implement mandated activities.

32. The reduction in the budget led to greater dependence on extrabudgetary resources, a source of funding that was neither stable nor predictable. That type of funding, moreover, was often used to achieve the aims of donor countries, which was contrary to the principle of shared responsibility. Moreover, all of the Organization's priorities were equally important and the setting of priorities and allocation of resources were the prerogative of Member States. Explanations should therefore be provided for any reallocation of resources.

33. His delegation noted the proposal to discontinue 912 outputs, but would refrain from commenting until it received additional information from the Secretariat,

especially since in many cases the arguments put forward did not appear to be compatible with the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning.

34. Syria noted with interest the consolidation of the United Nations information centres in Western Europe into a regional hub, in Brussels. It wished to know the amount of savings that was anticipated and how the consolidation would help ensure equality between the six official languages, and particularly Arabic, on the Organization's web site. An interim report by the Secretary-General on the subject would enable the General Assembly to judge the success of the experiment and to decide whether to extend it to the developing countries.

35. His delegation would like once again to draw attention to the priority issues in the medium-term plan, which were economic growth, sustainable development, international cooperation for development, and the New Partnership for Africa's Development: Syria was ready to take part in constructive negotiations on the various budget sections during the informal consultations and trusted that the Secretariat would provide the needed information.

Agenda item 123: Improving the financial situation of the United Nations (*continued*) (A/58/531)

36. **Mr. Tal** (Jordan) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and noted that the financial stability of the Organization depended on the will of Member States to honour their financial commitments in full and without conditions. Jordan was concerned that certain Member States, particularly those whose assessment was high, were not up to date with payment of their assessed contributions. It understood, however, that certain countries, in particular developing countries, could experience difficulties in paying their assessed contributions in full because they might be undergoing an economic crisis.

37. Aggregate assessment levels approved by Member States applicable to the regular budget, the budget of the two International Tribunals, peacekeeping and the capital master plan was $3,904 million. At the same time, the total amount of unpaid contributions at 30 September 2003 was more than $2,177 million, or 54 per cent of the credits voted by Member States. In view of that situation, Jordan wondered how the Organization could assume the responsibilities entrusted to it and insisted on the need for Member States to fulfil their commitments towards the Organization, so that it could implement the reform plan that had been launched with the support of the General Assembly.

38. Jordan, which was one of the main troop-contributing countries, attached a great deal of importance to peacekeeping operations. The reduction in cash reserves available for peacekeeping operations, particularly those of closed missions, due to cross-borrowing by the Organization, risked having negative consequences on reimbursements to countries providing troops and equipment. The Organization's debt to Member States was rising and currently stood at $565 million, as against $495 million the previous May. There was some improvement, however, in the sense that the delay in reimbursing amounts for equipment was now only nine months, as against one year in December 2002, and three as opposed to six months for troops. It would be necessary to take drastic measures to speed up the reimbursement of the debt owed to troop-contributing countries and to give the matter all the necessary attention in order to avoid a situation in which States pull out from peacekeeping operations.

39. It was important to keep Member States regularly informed of the financial situation of the Organization and the Secretary-General should submit an annual report on the level of payment of contributions by Member States and on the negative repercussions of the non-payment of contributions on the Organization's functioning and its ability to assume its responsibilities in the field of international peace and security.

40. **Mr. Kittikhoun** (Lao People's Democratic Republic), speaking on behalf of the member States of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), said that the members of ASEAN associated themselves with the statement made by the Permanent Representative of Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. The Association drew attention to the fact that the total amount of unpaid contributions, which was $2.3 billion, would limit the Organization's ability to implement the programmes and activities mandated by Member States. The cash flow situation was critical and that compelled the Organization to cross-borrow from the accounts of closed peacekeeping operations. The slight improvement in the troop and

equipment debt situation for 2003 was offset by the slowdown in reimbursements to troop-contributing countries.

41. The Association was of the view that the financial difficulties faced by the Organization were due principally to the fact that Member States did not honour their financial commitments. Member States should settle their arrears and pay their assessed contributions in full, on time and without conditions. That was the only viable way to restore the financial health of the United Nations. The Association remained sensitive to the situation of Member States experiencing specific financial difficulties and would endeavour to find ways of improving the financial situation of the Organization.

42. **Mr. Sekudo** (Nigeria) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made by the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. The survival of the Organization and its ability to carry out the tasks entrusted to it depended on the collective will of Member States to pay assessed contributions in full and on time. His delegation was pleased to note that 121 Member States had paid their regular budget assessments in full, as against 117 for the same period in 2002 and that, according to the Secretary-General's report, the Organization might end the year with a positive cash balance of $103 million. The Organization's finances nevertheless remained precarious and unpaid regular budget assessments amounted to $693 million.

43. Member States experiencing economic hardship understandably deserved sympathetic consideration. Nigeria, which was itself in that situation, spent considerable sums on debt servicing. Over the course of the previous 10 months, for example, it had spent $716 million on debt servicing and $33 billion on the servicing and repayment of its debt between 1985 and 2002, though it still owed $32 billion. That notwithstanding, it remained committed to meeting its obligations to the Organization.

44. His delegation noted with concern that the two International Criminal Tribunals would end 2003 with a shortfall of $29 million in its cash balance. It regretted the attitude of Member States that obliged the Organization to cross-borrow from the accounts of peacekeeping operations to finance its regular budget deficit. That practice risked obliterating the gains that had been made with increased receipts for peacekeeping operation assessments, where the amount of unpaid contributions did not exceed $1,559 million, as against $1,777 million as at 30 September 2002. It was also to the detriment of Member States that provided troops and equipment. Delays in reimbursements of debt imposed additional burdens on developing countries such as Nigeria that made a significant contribution to peacekeeping operations. The Organization must set the example by paying its debts on time. His delegation would like to know how the Organization expected to cope with the reimbursement of $84 million to Member States in March 2004, given that only $42 million would be available.

45. **Ms. Ribeiro Viotti** (Brazil) said that her delegation endorsed the statements made by the representatives of Morocco, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, and of Peru on behalf of the Rio Group. It was fully aware of the fact that the Organization's financial situation required improvement. Brazil was committed to overcoming the obstacles that had prevented it paying its assessed contributions on time. Those obstacles were due in part to the substantial decrease in foreign investment during the previous year, which had led to a steep devaluation of the Brazilian currency and forced the Government to adopt a stringent fiscal policy, even as it struggled to address the social inequalities and poverty that currently affected more than 40 million Brazilians.

46. The revision of the scale of assessments in 2000 and the imposition of an artificial ceiling that distorted the principle of capacity to pay placed a heavy burden on many Member States, including Brazil. Without calling into question resolution 55/5 B or the methodology adopted, she wished to note that a scale of assessments that did not reflect the real capacity of States to pay could only increase the difficulties faced by developing countries. Brazil was nevertheless confident that it would be able to pay its outstanding contributions and implement a system that would allow it to pay its assessed contributions on time.

47. **Ms. Lock** (South Africa) said that her delegation associated itself with the statement made by the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. All Member States had an obligation to pay their assessed contributions in full, on time and without conditions. She was, however, aware that circumstances might cause some countries to have genuine difficulties in meeting their obligations.

48. Her delegation had been pleased to note just five months previously that the total cash on hand had reached its highest level in seven years. It was therefore understandably alarmed by the Secretariat's projections that the regular budget might post a deficit owing to the late or non-payment of assessed contributions by more than a third of the Member States. It was more worrying still to learn that 116 Member States had so far made no payments whatsoever towards their assessments for the budget of the two International Criminal Tribunals, bringing the total of unpaid contributions to $117 million. She wished to stress that the success of the Tribunals depended on adequate and predictable financing. Regrettably, for five of the first 10 months of 2003, the cash position of the Tribunals had been negative.

49. Her delegation acknowledged that the United Nations had little alternative but to cross-borrow from peacekeeping accounts to fund the regular budget and the budgets of the International Tribunals, but it was concerned at the practice. Given the amount of the borrowings ($125 million for the regular budget and $41 million for the Tribunals), the Organization would no doubt be unable to return to Member States, in March 2003, the sum of $84 million in respect of closed peacekeeping missions, as it had planned. Her delegation was of the view that a different approach should be taken, although it recognized that it was only fair to reimburse the Member States in question. It trusted that the Committee would soon give serious consideration to the matter.

50. Her delegation welcomed the progress made in reimbursing Member States that had provided troops and equipment to peacekeeping operations. Many of those States were developing countries, especially in Africa, and their capacity to support peacekeeping would be greatly enhanced if the United Nations reimbursed them in a timely manner.

51. **Mr. Zhang** Yishan (China) said that his delegation endorsed the statement made by the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and supported the reforms undertaken by the Secretary-General with a view to strengthening the United Nations and improving its planning and budgeting process. Reform was one way for the Organization to more effectively manage and implement its programmes and activities, optimize the use of its resources and maximize output so as to better serve Member States. In order for the reforms to succeed, however, the Organization must be provided with a solid and stable financial basis. It was therefore important for all Member States to fulfil their financial obligations in full, on time and without conditions.

52. The current financial situation of the Organization was precarious. As at the beginning of October, unpaid assessed contributions for the regular budget, the International Tribunals and peacekeeping operations stood at $693 million, $117 million and $1,370 million, respectively. Clearly, the failure by some countries to meet their financial obligations seriously hampered the functioning of the United Nations. China was a developing country, which had nevertheless paid its contribution for 2003 in full and on time, thereby reaffirming its commitment to a strong Organization capable of playing a leading role on the international stage.

53. **Ms. Zobrist Rentenaar** (Switzerland) said that the Organization's financial situation was less than satisfactory and regretted that the state of its accounts had deteriorated in 2003, following a promising year in 2002. Aggregate assessment levels could reach $4 billion in 2003, equivalent to the levels reached in 2001, because of the increase in expenses incurred in peacekeeping operations.

54. The total amount of unpaid assessments for the four budgets, namely, the regular budget, the budget of the International Criminal Tribunals, the capital master plan and the peacekeeping budget, was nearly $2.4 billion for 2003. The Tribunals' share was especially meagre, inasmuch as 116 countries had yet to make a contribution. In her judgement, the situation was most irregular and she wished to point out that Member States' obligations to the Tribunals were as strict as their obligations to the regular budget or to the peacekeeping budget. The same was true of the capital master plan. Her delegation regretted that the Organization found it necessary to cross-borrow from the budgets of closed peacekeeping missions to fund the Tribunals and, to a lesser extent, the regular budget. It was encouraging, however, to note that the outstanding amounts owed to the peacekeeping budget were at their lowest level in many years, despite the increase in peacekeeping assessments for 2003.

55. The United Nations depended on the contributions of its Members to fulfil its mandates. Those contributions were the fruit of compromises that reflected the will of States to provide the Organization

with the means to accomplish the tasks they entrusted to it. Only in exceptional circumstances could non-payment of contributions within the prescribed deadlines be justified. Her delegation wished to reiterate that Member States must pay their contributions in full, on time and without conditions.

56. **Mrs. Wahab** (Indonesia) said that her delegation supported the statements made on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and on behalf of the member countries of the Association of South-East Asian Nations. Member States were obliged under the Charter to bear the expenses of the Organization and, consequently, to pay their assessed contributions in full, on time and without conditions. It was worth noting, however, that some countries, particularly developing countries, might be temporarily unable to assume their financial responsibilities.

57. Her delegation was concerned that the Organization had been unable to stabilize its financial situation, despite the improvement that had begun in 2001. In fact, total unpaid assessments amounted to $2,380 million as at 30 September 2003, which explained the persistence of the Organization's financial problems. Given that the proposed programme budget for the period 2004-2005 was before the General Assembly, it was important to provide the Organization with the means to accomplish the tasks entrusted to it by the Member States. That was all the more important as, following the events of recent months, international public opinion had misgivings about the Organization.

58. Her delegation believed that the practice of cross-borrowing from the peacekeeping budgets could delay reimbursement to countries that contributed troops and equipment. The situation was particularly worrying, if only because many of the countries in question were developing countries. Her delegation noted also the delay in effecting reimbursements, owing to difficulties encountered in signing memorandums of understanding and to cash shortages in several peacekeeping missions.

59. **Mr. Al-Mansour** (Kuwait) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made by the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Kuwait attached great importance to the question of improving the financial situation of the United Nations. His delegation had listened carefully to the explanations on the state of the regular budget, the peacekeeping budget and the budget of the International Criminal Tribunals, as well as on the Organization's periodic financial crises, which were due to the fact that certain Member States, especially some of those with high assessments, did not fulfil their obligations under the Charter. The accumulated arrears considerably reduced the Organization's capacity to accomplish its tasks. Kuwait was one of the countries that fulfilled their obligations on time and was one of the most reliable contributors.

60. His delegation noted with concern that unpaid contributions amounted to $2,360 million and that the Secretariat was obliged to cover negative cash positions by, where possible, cross-borrowing from the peacekeeping budgets. The situation could not improve unless Member States made greater efforts and respected their commitments. All Member States should settle their arrears in full, without delay and without conditions.

61. **Mr. Chowdhury** (Bangladesh) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made by the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. It was concerned by the Organization's current financial difficulties. During the two preceding years, payment by Member States of their assessed contributions and reimbursement by the Organization of the amounts owed to Member States had reached a satisfactory level. However, the Organization had soon slipped back into the all too familiar situation of insufficient cash balances that forced it to cross-borrow from the peacekeeping accounts, mounting unpaid assessments, and increasing indebtedness to Member States. Bangladesh, which paid its assessed contributions to both the regular budget and the peacekeeping support account, was concerned at the situation. It was common knowledge that the Organization's financial health was heavily dependent on the prompt payment of contributions. The situation was all the more regrettable as it was largely attributable to the few Member States that failed to fulfil their obligations. Member States should honour the commitments they had made under the Charter.

62. The total amount of outstanding peacekeeping contributions had fallen in 2003, which was all the more encouraging as assessments were due to be increased. Nevertheless, the level was still too high. It was reassuring to note that the cash balance for peacekeeping operations remained stable, but it must not be forgotten that the total indebtedness of the

Organization would reach $565 million by the end of the year. The situation could become even worse, forcing the Organization to fund regular budget expenditures by cross-borrowing from the peacekeeping budgets. That practice was unhealthy and resulted in delayed reimbursement of the funds owed to Member States providing troops or equipment, as had been the case in the past.

63. He noted with satisfaction the efforts made by the Secretary-General to reimburse Member States during the year in which the expenditures were effected. However, there was still a long way to go before reaching the target of reimbursing countries that provided troops within three months and those that provided equipment within six.

64. Most of the troop-contributing countries were developing countries, which mobilized considerable human and material resources, often under difficult circumstances. Delay in reimbursement of the amounts owed to them increased their burden. As the largest contributor of troops, Bangladesh could never overemphasize the need for the Organization to settle its debts in a timely manner. It was particularly concerned to note that the Organization's debt to Bangladesh, which amounted to approximately $69 million, was its largest. The situation required immediate attention. All Member States must pay their outstanding contributions so that the Organization could accomplish its mandated tasks.

65. **Ms. Goicochea** (Cuba) said that her delegation endorsed the statement made by the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. It was concerned that the current practice did not allow delegations to receive the report of the Secretary-General on the item under consideration sufficiently in advance. The item called for an in-depth debate and follow-up by Member States in the form of informal consultations or the adoption of a draft resolution.

66. The situation described in the report gave cause for concern, particularly in the light of the changes made by the General Assembly to the scale of assessments and to the financing of peacekeeping operations in resolutions 55/5 and 55/231. The implementation of the new scales, which had resulted in a substantial increase in the assessments of many countries, the majority of which were developing countries, departed from the principle of capacity to pay. The increase in assessments due to the lowering of the ceiling rate put many developing countries in the unusual position of having to default on their payments, despite their efforts to fulfil their obligations under the Charter. Cuba was a case in point.

67. It was unacceptable that, owing to the cash shortfall in the Organization's regular budget, troop-contributing developing countries should not be reimbursed in a timely manner, despite the improvements that had been recorded since 2002. That situation called for corrective measures and, first and foremost, genuine political will on the part of that State that owed the largest amount to the Organization and whose arrears, as at September 2003, represented some 72 per cent of the total arrears under the regular budget and 47 per cent of the total amount due under the peacekeeping budget. Her delegation took note of the partial payments to the peacekeeping budget made by that Member State and its commitment to make an additional payment under the regular budget. The General Assembly should closely monitor the status of those payments and, if necessary, revise the ceiling rate upwards when the scale of assessments for the period 2007-2009 was fixed.

68. Her delegation noted with satisfaction that, following the failure of the Working Group on the Financial Situation of the United Nations, the Committee on Contributions had been requested to consider a series of proposals on which the Working Group had been unable to reach agreement. She took the view that an expert body could not be expected to make recommendations on questions of a political nature that went beyond the scope of its mandate and that the proposals should be discussed during the Committee's consideration of the current agenda item.

69. She wished to draw attention to the specific case of her country, which had been subject to an economic, trade and financial embargo for over 40 years, was prohibited from using the United States dollar in its international transactions, and was at the mercy of exchange rate fluctuations. The obligation to pay its contributions to the United Nations through the intermediary of a third country created additional obstacles for Cuba, particularly in its dealings with banks, which sometimes blocked its transactions. All of those reasons, which were compounded by its current economic difficulties, explained the payment methods that had been employed by Cuba in 2003. She wished to reaffirm her country's determination to meet its financial commitments under the Charter.

70. **Mr. Sharma** (Nepal) said that his delegation endorsed the statement made by the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and noted with deep concern the worsening financial situation of the United Nations. It was clear from the report of the Secretary-General (A/58/531) that the Organization was once again in the throes of a financial crisis, despite the significant decline in the level of arrears following the adoption, three years previously, of the new scale of assessments. It was difficult to understand how countries whose contributions had been substantially reduced under the new scale could still be in arrears, while other countries that were experiencing financial difficulties fulfilled their obligations. The total amount of unpaid assessments had reached $2.380 million and the Organization had been forced since July to resort to cross-borrowing from closed peacekeeping operations in order to finance expenditures under the regular budget.

71. That situation was a source of serious concern to all Member States, particularly those awaiting reimbursements for troops and equipment. The fact that outstanding peacekeeping assessments had decreased by $217 million in 2003 was scant consolation for poor countries awaiting their payments. His delegation was extremely concerned to note that, as at September 2003, the projected amount owed to Member States for troops and equipment was $565 million. The delay in reimbursing those amounts could only be detrimental to peacekeeping and weaken the already fragile economies of the developing countries that contributed those vital resources. The utmost priority must therefore be given to resolving that problem.

72. Nepal congratulated those Member States that had paid their contributions in full and on time and urged other countries to do likewise. Rescheduling of payments should be authorized only in cases of force majeure. The Organization's financial difficulties had serious ramifications for its performance and threatened to undermine its ability to respond to emergencies and to meet the challenges of a new world.

73. The Secretariat must nevertheless pursue the reform process in order to reduce expenditures and recover outstanding contributions. He welcomed the measures that had already been taken, although much remained to be done to improve the efficiency of the Organization and collect contributions. Generally speaking, the Organization must endeavour to seek other resources in addition to assessments. That issue should receive the full attention of Member States in the context of the revitalization of the United Nations.

74. A number of countries were unhappy with the current scale of assessments. That issue should be considered at the appropriate time and genuine grievances addressed. Each Member State must contribute to the United Nations according to its capacity, which was a fair and objective criterion for an Organization that stood for the promotion of democracy and justice.

75. **Mr. Lee** (Republic of Korea) said he was pleased to note that the overall financial situation of the Organization was positive. Nevertheless, several new or recurring trends were cause for concern. Firstly, the number of Member States that had paid their regular budget assessments in full was decreasing. Secondly, because of delayed payment or non-payment on the part of some Member States, the Organization had once again recorded a negative cash balance that would have to be funded by cross-borrowing from the peacekeeping accounts, which also had limited cash reserves. His delegation wished to reiterate that all Member States must pay their contributions, in accordance with the Charter. It also hoped that the payment that was shortly to be made by one of the countries with the highest assessed contribution would enable the Organization to reverse the negative cash position in the regular budget by the end of the year.

76. The situation of the two International Criminal Tribunals was indeed alarming. Only 60 Member States had paid their contributions in full, and arrears had reached a record level of $117 million. Their cash balance had already been negative in July, forcing them to borrow $41 million from the peacekeeping accounts. Furthermore, some Member States chose not to contribute to the budget of the Tribunals, even though expenses were expected to increase in the years ahead. The Secretariat should manage the Tribunals' budgets more strictly, so as to increase the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of their operations and win them greater support from Member States.

77. The situation appeared less serious in the case of peacekeeping operations. However, the amount available for borrowing from closed peacekeeping missions would, by the end of the year, be only $42 million, whereas $187 million would be needed to cover the deficits in the regular budget and in the

budgets for the Tribunals and for current peacekeeping operations. Nevertheless, he noted with satisfaction the progress made in 2003 in the reimbursement of funds owed to Member States for peacekeeping operations. Arrears recovered in respect of the peacekeeping budgets should be used, first and foremost, to repay sums owed to Member States.

78. **Mr. Aljunied** (Singapore) said that his delegation endorsed the statements made on behalf of the Association of South-East Asian Nations and of the Group of 77 and China. In its view, the Organization's financial instability was the result of, inter alia, the unpredictability of payments by Member States of their assessed contributions and of their contributions to the peacekeeping budgets and to the budgets of the International Tribunals and of the capital master plan. His delegation noted with concern that, as at 23 October 2003, only 121 Member States had paid their assessed contributions in full, which represented progress in relation to 2002 but regression when compared with 2000 and 2001. Total arrears amounted to $693 million for the regular budget and $1.3 billion for the peacekeeping budgets.

79. Non-payment by Member States of their assessed contributions was a fundamental problem that negatively affected the Organization's financial flexibility and stability. For far too long, one group of Member States had been financing the obligations of others and the time had come for the practice to cease. Its financial difficulties reduced the capacity of the United Nations to implement its mandated programmes and activities fully and effectively and forced it to resort to expedient means, such as cross-borrowing from the peacekeeping accounts, to make up the shortfall in its cash balance. Such stopgaps, however, could not deal with the root causes of the problem. At the same time, some countries were deprived of the funds owed to them from closed peacekeeping missions. Apart from having financial consequences, such measures adversely affected the credibility of the Organization and the willingness of some Member States to participate in peacekeeping operations.

80. A situation in which Member States themselves were obstructing the Organization's ability to act must be brought to an end. In the light of the current international environment and the increased tasks and responsibilities facing the United Nations, financial stability was more important than ever before. His delegation called upon Member States in arrears to fulfil their obligations in full, on time and without conditions.

81. **Mr. Ramlal** (Trinidad and Tobago) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made by the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. It noted with concern the level of unpaid contributions and, in particular, the precarious financial situation of the International Criminal Tribunals. Only the settlement of all arrears and the payment of all assessed contributions in full, on time and without conditions would ensure the stability and viability of the Organization and the implementation of the mandates and programmes entrusted to it. The Organization's financial health therefore depended largely on the political will of Member States to fulfil their obligations.

82. His Government had recently taken the decision to settle all its arrears to the peacekeeping support account and anticipated paying the sum of $336,000 in November 2003. It would also pay that month $38,000 in outstanding contributions to the Organization's regular budget. With those payments, Trinidad and Tobago would have fulfilled all of its obligations for 2003 to the regular budget, the budgets of the International Criminal Tribunals and the capital master plan, thereby demonstrating his Government's serious commitment to meeting its obligations. He urged other Member States to show evidence of the same determination.

83. **Mr. Mpundu** (Zambia) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made by the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. It was a matter of concern that the Organization's financial difficulties, which were due to non-payment by some Member States of their assessed contributions, should lead to cross-borrowing from the peacekeeping accounts. That practice must be discouraged. If it continued, the peacekeeping accounts would soon have no funds left from which to borrow.

84. While it was understandable that some developing countries might be unable to pay their contributions, those countries that had the capacity to pay should meet their financial obligations to the Organization on time, to enable it to fulfil its mandates.

85. Motivated by its desire to contribute to international peace and security, Zambia provided troops and civilian police to peacekeeping operations, even though its participation was restricted by a lack of

resources. The United Nations owed Zambia large sums of money for troops and equipment. Despite its economic difficulties, which were due mainly to deteriorating terms of trade, Zambia had paid its assessed contribution to the Organization's regular budget. It was also in the process of paying the balance of its arrears.

86. **Mr. Abbas** (Pakistan) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made by the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. It was concerned at the worsening financial situation of the Organization and at the high level of debt owed to Member States, which represented a particularly heavy burden for troop-contributing countries such as Pakistan, to which the Organization owed $62.5 million. Although the Organization had managed to reduce its debt, its reimbursement plan for the year might not reach its target level.

87. While Pakistan welcomed the Organization's efforts to keep repayment levels higher than the level of its obligations and to lower its debt to Member States, it was concerned at the practice of cross-borrowing from peacekeeping accounts and joined the call of the Group of 77 for the Secretariat to explore other ways of financing cash-flow deficits.

88. Notwithstanding its financial difficulties, Pakistan had always responded to the calls of the United Nations and played its role in the maintenance of international peace and security. It had participated in several important peacekeeping missions and had always paid its contributions in full and on time. It hoped that all Member States would demonstrate their commitment to ensuring the financial stability of the Organization by doing likewise, in fulfilment of their obligations under the Charter and the decisions of the General Assembly.

89. Even though the Committee discussed the financial situation of the United Nations every year, its discussions were never translated into a specific decision or resolution. The Committee should explore the possibility of setting up a follow-up mechanism for the item.

90. **Mr. Elji** (Syrian Arab Republic) said his delegation associated itself with the statement made by the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. The financial situation of the Organization, which was a matter of great importance to the Syrian Arab Republic, appeared to have improved in 2001 only to experience a fall in contribution levels from the second half of 2002 and a continued decline in 2003. His delegation was concerned at that trend and its impact on the ability of the Organization to fulfil its mandates.

91. His delegation was also concerned at the practice of cross-borrowing from closed peacekeeping accounts. The Organization should be using those funds to repay its debt to countries that contributed troops and equipment. Furthermore, because most troop-contributing countries were developing nations, all Member States, particularly those with high assessments, should pay their contributions in full, on time and without conditions. The Syrian Arab Republic had paid its contributions to the regular budget and the peacekeeping budget in full, with the exception of contributions for the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF).

92. **Ms. Bertini** (Under-Secretary-General for Management), responding to the questions and comments of members, said that the financial situation of the Organization was of concern to everyone and agreed with delegations that the Secretary-General, as the manager of the Organization's resources, was responsible for ensuring that assessed contributions were paid in full and on time. To encourage Member States to fulfil their financial obligations promptly, the Secretariat wrote to their Permanent Missions and sent reminders to Member States whose contributions were in arrears.

93. The Secretariat did not like the practice of cross-borrowing from the accounts of closed peacekeeping missions any more than Member States. It would far prefer contributions to be paid on time, but cross-borrowing was the only way for it to continue functioning. It had no way of drawing on the peacekeeping reserve fund or from the accounts of active peacekeeping operations, nor could it resort to costly private-sector borrowing. It could not choose either to suspend or freeze activities which the General Assembly had decided on, or to implement certain mandates rather than others.

94. Ongoing peacekeeping operations were not affected by cross-borrowing, so reimbursements to troop-contributing countries were also unaffected. As a number of delegations had also pointed out, the Secretariat had made successful efforts to reduce the

delay in the reimbursement of countries that contributed troops and equipment. The remaining delays in processing applications for reimbursement were caused mainly by late payment of assessed contributions or because the relevant memorandums of understanding were signed late.

95. Specifically with regard to the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) and the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), currently available resources were sufficient to cover operating costs but not sufficient to enable countries contributing troops and equipment to be reimbursed promptly. As a result, payments for contributions to UNFICYP were eight months behind for troops and six months behind for equipment, for UNMIK nine months behind for troops and 18 months behind for equipment, and for MINURSO were 18 months behind for both troops and equipment. The situation imposed severe burdens on countries providing troops and equipment, and the Secretary-General urged Member States that had not yet paid their contributions for those missions to do so without delay.

96. While the delayed payment of assessed contributions was not currently affecting activities covered by the regular budget or the operation of the International Criminal Tribunals, if the shortfall in resources continued, programmes would have to be reviewed and choices made. The Secretary-General had no room for manoeuvre, as only the Member States could alter the mandates that they had given him.

97. The Secretariat had been forced to borrow $41 million from the accounts of closed peacekeeping missions to fund the International Criminal Tribunals. If Member States failed to pay arrears for the Tribunals for 2003 and failed to pay their contributions for 2004 promptly in January 2004, as they were supposed to do, the Organization would not be in a position in April 2004 to pay the $84 million owed to Member States for closed peacekeeping missions.

98. Since she had presented the report on the financial situation of the Organization the previous week, one more Member State, San Marino, had paid its assessed contribution to the regular budget, thereby bringing to 122 the number of Member States that had paid in full. The number that had not done so stood at 26. Croatia and Finland should be added to the list of countries that had paid all their contributions, joining Australia, Canada, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Germany, Kuwait, Liechtenstein, Monaco, New Zealand, Norway, Sierra Leone, Slovakia, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom on the list of prompt payers.

99. *Mr. Leon (Venezuela) took the Chair.*

Other matters

Smoking ban in the Secretariat entrance to the garage

100. **Mr. Toh** (Assistant Secretary-General for Central Support Services), responding to questions raised by the delegation of Costa Rica at the first meeting, said that for an initial period, until the end of September, security officers had been instructed simply to remind people found smoking in the Secretariat that the building was a no-smoking area and then to ask them to refrain from smoking.

101. From 1 October onwards, security officers had been instructed to, where possible, note the names of persons found smoking, their department, in the case of Secretariat staff, or mission, in the case of diplomats, and to submit the list of names to the Administration on a weekly basis. The Administration would in turn submit the names to the respective heads of department or mission, who would take such measures as they deemed fit.

102. The Secretariat had not established a "smoking police" nor had the welfare of delegates and staff been in any way neglected. Security officers remained at their usual posts and intervened only if they noticed a violation of the smoking ban. Furthermore, all security officers had been instructed to avoid all confrontation with smokers, whether staff or diplomats, unless they presented a clear and present danger, and especially if there was a risk of fire due to the proximity of combustible materials.

103. **Mr. Dutton** (Australia) said that his delegation welcomed the Secretariat's bulletin on the non-smoking policy at Headquarters and considered that the Secretary-General had acted in accordance with his mandate. However, since certain delegations had requested details of the legal basis for the decision, his delegation would carefully study the Secretariat's response.

104. The Committee would also welcome from the Secretariat clarification of those aspects of the decision relating to the health of delegates and staff members, the cost of insurance, risks of fire, and any other aspect that it might consider appropriate.

105. The risks of second-hand smoke had been scientifically proven and the poor ventilation in the Headquarters building served only to accentuate those risks. More and more Governments were banning smoking in public places as a public health measure. That concern had been reflected at the international level in the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, which had been unanimously adopted by the 192 member States of the World Health Organization (WHO) in May 2003.

106. The time had come for the General Assembly to ban tobacco use in all United Nations buildings, not just in New York but all over the world, in order to protect the health of staff and diplomats, as well as that of visitors. His delegation would introduce a draft text on the subject at the appropriate time.

107. **Ms. Goicochea** (Cuba) thanked the Secretariat for its responses and noted that, although her country was a tobacco producer, it had welcomed the work of WHO on the Framework Convention. Her delegation's intervention was therefore not an attempt to defend Cuba's economic interests but rather to obtain answers to two questions.

108. The first question concerned the legal basis for the decision. Her delegation wondered about the link between the decision of the Administration and the resolution of the General Assembly, which merely discouraged tobacco use, but did not ban it outright.

109. The second question concerned the budgetary implications of the decision. Her delegation wished in particular to know how much the Organization had spent on removing ashtrays from the building and whether it had been necessary to employ staff or to pay overtime to enforce the decision.

110. Furthermore, if the Secretariat had conducted a study on the effects of second-hand smoke on health, her delegation would like to know whether it had been conducted with existing resources or whether outside assistance had been sought. If the latter, it would like to know how much it had cost.

111. **Mr. El Naggar** (Egypt) said that his delegation supported the position taken by the Australian delegation. It was for the General Assembly to take a decision, especially since it had already taken a position on the matter. He regretted that the Secretariat had not answered the question about the legal aspects of the decision. His delegation had taken note of the conference room paper submitted by the Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services. The question of the safety of staff and delegates was very important and the meaning of the phrase "clear and present danger" needed to be defined. It would also be helpful for the Secretariat to provide written responses to all the questions that had been asked.

112. **Mr. Repasch** (United States of America) welcomed the Secretary-General's decision to ban tobacco use in the Secretariat. The Secretary-General, who was the chief Administrator of the United Nations, had acted within the mandate given to him by the General Assembly, which was to create a working environment that protected the health and safety of staff and delegates.

113. He thanked the Secretariat for providing an initial response to the questions raised by Costa Rica, but would welcome additional information about the financial and legal implications of the decision and about whether the local authorities were willing to protect a building that did not conform to local security regulations. It was essential that the Secretary-General take steps to ensure respect for those regulations and, in the opinion of the United States delegation, he had done just that by taking the decision to ban tobacco use.

114. In his view, second-hand smoke did indeed represent a "clear and present danger" to the health of staff and delegates alike.

115. **Mr. Sun** Minqin (China) said that the Secretariat had not provided the requested explanations and his delegation would await them before commenting.

116. **Mr. de Alba** (Mexico) thanked the Assistant Secretary-General for the explanations he had provided, but deemed them insufficient. The question was to determine not whether or not to ban tobacco use in the Secretariat, but whether the Secretary-General could ignore a resolution of the General Assembly and take a unilateral decision, without first consulting Member States. For its part, Mexico was ready to review the relevant resolution with a view to its amendment.

117. Mr. Toh had noted that security officers had been instructed to treat delegates in a courteous manner, but that instruction had not always been respected. Some officers had intervened physically to stop delegates from smoking.

118. His delegation also wished to protest strongly against the fact that cars attached to its Mission were not able to access the Headquarters garage. It requested a written response from the Secretariat concerning the reasons for the measures taken in that regard.

119. **Mr. Gruzdev** (Russian Federation) thanked Mr. Toh for the responses he had provided, but regretted that certain Secretariat departments did not pay more attention to the work of the bodies that dealt with administrative matters.

120. The Russian Federation had already expressed its regret that there had been no representative of the Office of Legal Affairs at the previous meeting of the Committee for Programme and Coordination on the medium-term plan. It was regrettable that the situation had recurred and that the Committee had to continue its discussions without having received the information it had requested.

121. **Mr. Alarcón** (Costa Rica) thanked the Secretariat for its initial responses. His delegation did not question the decisions that had been taken in an effort to protect the health of staff. In fact, his own Government was working to promote a healthy working environment.

122. However, his delegation was very anxious to ensure that the decisions taken by the deliberating bodies were applied in accordance with the procedures in force and within the existing legal framework.

The meeting rose at 12.40 p.m.